Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 15 Number 3 March 2018

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11th March 2018: ICRISAT, Patancheru, 6.30AM.

ICRISAT is one of the richest birding spots around the city and a winter visit here is near mandatory. It boasts of a varied habitat with lakes, fields, ponds, grasslands, etc., and this makes for a varied species list. ICRISAT may give us Wire-tailed Swallows, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Yellow-wattled Lapwings, besides the water birds, a few raptors and some bush birds as well. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water as usual. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Tuesday, 6th March 2018, 6.00PM: TALK BY DR. (MRS.) V.A. MANGA: PLANTS IN THE LIFE OF BIRDS

Dr. (Mrs.) V.A. Manga, Life Member of BSAP, is a retired Associate Professor, Bhavan's New Science College, Hyderabad. After retirement, she took to her hobby of bird-watching and bird photography as a full-time occupation.

As we know, birds depend on plants for food, shelter and their very survival. Their dependence on grains, nectar and fruits is obvious. Similarly, the tree-hole nesters' requirements of wooded areas is apparent. Sometimes the role of plants in the life of birds may not be so obvious. Many birds have an interesting relationship with plants, and some can survive only in the vicinity of certain plants. The survival of any organism requires a healthy bionetwork. Dr Manga's talk will explore one aspect of that network - birds'

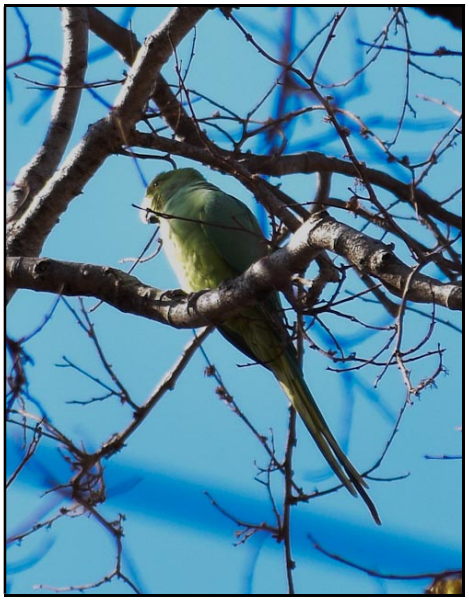
UNDER BIRDER'S LENS

Trip Report – Ananthagiri, February 25, 2018

Barnali Chaudhuri

Jungle Babbler (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

Ananthagiri is a beautiful hill located beside Sri Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple, around 80km from Hyderabad. Our meeting point for the trip was at Panjagutta crossroads. Starting off at around 6.45AM, we enjoyed nature to its fullest. After passing by Chilkur, we were surrounded by trees and vacant lands. Beautiful *palash* flowers welcomed us with their vivid red colour. Giant banyan trees provided shade on the road making it seem as if we were driving under an arch.



Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

After a stop at Vikarabad for morning tea/coffee, we reached our destination at around 8.45AM. I have visited Ananthagiri several times earlier, but this was my first birding trip to this place, so I was really excited. This time I came across several birds. First a Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) welcomed me, followed by a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*). We spotted a Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) jumping from one branch to another on the banyan tree. Before entering into the main forest area, we spotted the Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) under the shade of the big banyan tree. This was my bird of the day!

Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

I saw a White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) waving its tail just like a fan. There were many babblers hopping and chattering together throughout the forest. On the trunk of one tree I noticed 5 babblers quarrelling with each other. Aasheesh Sir spotted two very small birds on a big tree. They were Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), a male with orange plumage and a female with light brown colour.

Rufous Treepie (Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

We noticed a Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) on a banyan tree, and an Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) in its blue-and-white plumage.

Ultramarine Flycatcher (Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

We saw a White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) flying from one tree to another, while Sravan spotted a female Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). I would have loved to see a male Paradise-flycatcher with its white elegant tail, but unfortunately could not. Srikanth took a picture and showed it to me later, and I wished myself better luck next time.

Asian Paradise-flycatcher (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

I spotted a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) sitting on the branch of a tree. It was a really lovely, pleasant morning.

White-throated Kingfisher (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

Olive-backed Pipit (Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

Inside the forest, climbers shaded the area with the big old trees like an umbrella. The fresh air rejuvenated our body and mind. Surekha and I could not stop ourselves from taking pictures on a climber in the middle of the forest. I thank God for creating so much beauty.

People usually bring their food and enjoy eating there, but they throw their garbage inside the forest. The forest was littered with plastic bottles and plates despite the fact that there were some garbage bins. Surekha calls them the 'educated illiterate'! Ajit Sir's proposal to clean up the garbage was accepted wholeheartedly by everybody in the group.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

Asian Brown Flycatcher (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

We ended the day by taking a group photo inside the forest, after which we rested for a while at the shop opposite the temple, where the group refreshed themselves with tea/coffee. Leaving around noon, we encountered a lot of traffic on the way back. Besides this small hiccup, our journey was very beautiful and pleasant. I enjoyed it a lot; my thanks to BSAP for arranging this trip.

Mottled Wood Owl (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

After this trip to Ananthagiri, I realized that bird watching is not merely a hobby, but also a type of yoga on its own. It inculcates patience and forces us to be silent for some time. We rise early, which is healthy; it gives us relief from our mobiles for some time; it brings us closer to Mother Nature. We learn to love Nature more, and since one cannot destroy what one loves, we would try to protect Nature.

The irony is, mankind is Nature's highest creation and also Nature's worst enemy. Mother Nature provides so much for us to live in the world harmoniously, but we do so much damage. One big tree, cut due to urbanization, destroys birds' nests, their habitat and their food. Inculcating bird-watching can help educate people. I hope someday, bird-watching courses are included in school syllabi so that young children get the flavour of bird watching along with civic sense. As future citizens, I hope that children will try their best to protect Nature – something that we have neglected for so long.

Brown Fish Owl (Photo: Ritish Kannayagari)

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Bird of the Month

Umesh Mani

Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)

Red-crested Pochard Female (L) and Male (R) (Pulicat, December 24, 2017)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Netta*
Species: *N. rufina*
Size: 53-57 cm

Description & distribution: The Red-crested Pochard is a large diving duck that breeds in the southern Europe and central Asia, and is a winter visitor to parts of Africa and the Indian subcontinent, where it is seen abundantly in Pakistan and North India, and decreasing east till Assam and south till Chennai – it is not seen further south, or in Sri Lanka – and in smaller numbers in Myanmar. The adult male is distinctive, with a rich chestnut and golden orange head and mop-like crest, bright crimson or pinkish-red bill, black breast and tail, white flanks and light brown upperparts with white wing-mirrors. The female is primarily light brown, with a darker sooty brown back, nape and crown clearly demarcated from white face and neck, yellowish-tipped black or dark grey bill, and a whitish speculum. Non-breeding males are similar to the females, but with pinkish-red bills.

Habitat & behaviour: The Red-crested Pochard is a highly gregarious species, and is seen in large flocks, often along with other species like Tufted Ducks, Common Pochards, Northern Pintails and others. It prefers open wetlands like open lakes, shallow *jheels*, marshes with some vegetation and wet grasslands. Though a diving duck, it is often seen feeding on the surface, dabbling and upending. It feeds mainly on shoots and roots of aquatic plants, molluscs, insects and crustaceans. It is a skittish bird, and keeps silent more often than not. The call of the male is a wheezy *veht*, while the female utters a series of raspy *vrah vrah vrah* calls.

Nesting: The Red-crested Pochard usually breeds between mid-April and early June. The nest is built among vegetation by the lakeside, and the usual clutch consists of 8-12 pale green eggs.

Local name: The Red-crested Pochard is known as *'Lal chonch'* or *'Lal sir'* in Hindi, *'Deo hans'* in Assamese, *'Hero hans'* (for male) or *'Chobra hans'* (for female) in Bengali, *'Lal siri pochad'* in Punjabi and *'Yerra tala chiluva'* in Telugu.

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